

Transcript

[0:01] (music)

Derek Bruff: [0:05] This is Leading Lines. I'm Derek Bruff. So apparently, Vanderbilt librarians like to write books about educational technology. Back in Episode 36 of Leading Lines, we interviewed Vanderbilt librarian, Melissa Mallon, about her book on academic librarians and digital learning. Since then, Melissa has joined the Leading Lines team as a producer and today she brings us an interview with another Vanderbilt librarian about his new book on open educational resources. Andrew Wesolek is the Director of Digital Scholarship and Scholarly Communications at the Jean and Alexander Heard Libraries at Vanderbilt University. Andy is the coauthor, along with Jonathan Lashley and Anne Langley, of the new book *OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians*, published in 2018 by Pacific University Press. OER stands for "open educational resources." These are educational resources, including, but not limited to textbooks, that are published in ways that allow students and instructors to retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute them all for free. In the interview, Andy makes the case for the value of open educational resources to higher education, in terms of both affordability and student learning. And he offers advice for faculty and librarians interested in getting started using and creating open educational resources.

[1:27] (music)

Andrew Wesolek: [1:31] Hi, Melissa. Glad to be here.

Melissa Mallon: [1:34] Andy is the director of our Digital Scholarship and Scholarly Communications team.

Andy: [1:39] We have recently rebranded and our now DSC, Digital Scholarship and Communications.

Melissa: [1:44] Andy is the director of the DSC department in the libraries and he recently published a new book, which we're going to talk a little bit about today called, *OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians*. And this book was published in 2018 by Pacific University Press. And the subject of the book OER, open educational resources, is really what we're here to talk about today. And this is an area that Andy and I both are very passionate about. And we've done a lot of work in libraries on OER and trying to sort of expose campus to this topic. But before we jump in to talking about the book, Andy, I thought it might be helpful if you can explain what OER is.

Andy: [2:31] Absolutely, Melissa. Thanks. So as you mentioned in your introduction, OER stands for "open educational resources," which on its face seems like a fairly straightforward topic. But let's, I think, unpack that a little bit. First, what do we mean by open? So open in this case, it's referring to not only like the open availability of the resource online, but that resource being free of most copyright restrictions, as well, meaning you as a researcher or students or whomever can share those works, can repurpose them, can tailor them to your coursework, et cetera. So OER are really powerful for, for a couple of different reasons in higher education. The first is the issue of affordability. As we all know, that the cost of higher education is growing rather rapidly and is indeed becoming a severe barrier to many who would otherwise join. So while that's obviously a very complex problem with many different facets, one of the few areas that faculty can directly control related to the cost of higher education is the textbooks that they assign in their courses. And so OER are an option for faculty to require free textbooks of their students and reduce costs that way. The second thing we should care about higher education, I think, is that OER allow for new types of pedagogical practices because they're free of most copyright restrictions.

[4:05] So for example, and perhaps I should clarify that an OER can be anything from like a fully ready to go off-the-shelf textbook that's been written by a faculty member, peer reviewed by faculty, et cetera, and can be used freely in your class. Or it can be kind of cobbled together, resources that you find online. But one of the things that these open resources allow for, is for you as the faculty, again, to better tailor course materials to the specific courses that you're teaching. And then as I think we may talk about later, engaging students in the actual creation and production of these education materials, as well. So OER are really important from an affordability perspective, but also for the new types of pedagogy that they enable.

Melissa: [4:50] Actually, let's touch on that idea about students right now. So it sounds

like faculty who are interested in using OER have a lot of options for how they incorporate these resources into their, their classrooms, whether those are in-person classrooms or, or digital classrooms. Can you talk a little bit about some ways that can happen? And then I'm, I'm really interested in, you know, you've talked on the podcast a lot about the sort of "students as producers" model and so I'm wondering if there's a way that faculty can engage students in this work.

Andy: [5:30] Yeah, absolutely. So as I kind of briefly alluded to in the previous question, there are, I think many people think of OER as being just free textbooks. And that is true to an extent, but there's so much more like, there are, for example, OpenStax textbooks that have a wide array of off-the-shelf ready textbooks that you can just use in your course.

Melissa: [5:51] Is OpenStax the brand?

Andy: [5:54] OpenStax is the publisher. They're out of Rice University.

Melissa: [5:57] Ok.

Andy: [5:58] So but in terms of engaging students, there are a number of faculty that one, move away from what they called disposable assignments. So these are like the papers that the student doesn't actually want to write and the faculty member doesn't actually want to grade.

Melissa: [6:15] What? You mean, there's papers students don't want to write? (sarcastically laughs)

Andy: [6:16] Hard to believe. Hard to believe, also, that some of these are read by one person, faculty, and then likely thrown in the garbage, right? So this is what's called a disposable assignment, right? It just, that demonstrates the student's knowledge. But OER allow us to engage students to produce materials in open ways, so we can think about things like working with students to edit Wikipedia pages, for example, so that they're contributing to kind of the progression of knowledge or to an educational resource or someone else or perhaps compiling and annotating anthologies of public domain resources to, to create new types of texts or even engaging students in the creation of assessment materials for, for future colleagues. So there are a lot of ways to engage students to kind of produce OER that both drive down costs and gets them more engaged in

education, really, because it's again, not something that they expect one person to read and then to go away when they're editing a Wikipedia page, they know that that is going out into the world and others will be interacting with it.

Melissa: [7:19] So do you think it's important for faculty that are pulling students in, in the production of these resources or even just contributing to things that already exist, like Wikipedia. How important is it to talk about why as an instructor you're having students do that? And do you have tips for how that conversation might go?

Andy: [7:43] Yeah. So that's a great question. And I think so I come from like a scholarly communication and copyright background in the library, so I'm going to try and answer from that angle and then maybe we can kind of flesh it out, if it doesn't get to your question.

Melissa: [7:57] Great.

Andy: [7:57] But, I think one of the, one of the most interesting aspects of engaging with students in the use and development of OER is that it allows faculty to teach a whole host of kind of tangential topics that are of increasing importance in our online and increasingly open environments. And I'm thinking specifically, about how things like copyright and intellectual property work in the online world, right? Like students these days, have grown up in this environment where nearly everything is like free to read online, right? But free to read doesn't necessarily mean that it's free of copyright restrictions. So what can and can't we do with the materials that we find online to repurpose them for other purposes? And in addition to that, I often will give copyright talks to students. And I will ask the class like how many of you hold the copyright in a material? And almost no one will raise their hand when in fact, we're all generating copyrights all the time, every post that you put on Instagram or Facebook or whatever. Melissa is taking notes right now. The notes that she's writing down, she holds copyright in these, right? Like we're all, we're producing intellectual content that has copyright all the time. And the more that, that copyright protected material is out online and openly visible. We need to teach students how to engage with it in really productive ways and how to be effective stewards of their own intellectual property online, as well.

Melissa: [9:25] That's great. I love that. And it sort of goes back to your kind of multi-prong definition earlier that, you know, you can get to the affordability piece and that's important. But that doesn't, that it doesn't necessarily have to be the driving factor,

right? And there's so much more wrapped into using, especially when you're having students contribute and participate to, to helping them see the world as a place to share information and knowledge.

Andy: [9:53] That's exactly right. David Wiley has an amazing quote that I'll paraphrase here that I think sums this up nicely. He says that like using an off-the-shelf OER is great for the affordability purposes, like as you mentioned. But it's akin to driving an airplane down the road, right? Like that's just not the full potential of what these things are capable of doing like, yeah, they'll do the job. But OER, by virtue of having limited copyright restrictions, allow us to create whole new forms of pedagogy.

Melissa: [10:23] So are there, you mentioned that there are places that people can go to find OER that have already been created. But I like this idea of and I think, and you can talk about this if you want. But one of the kind of, principles behind OER, I believe, is the idea of remixing, right? So would you be able to speak a little bit on if a faculty member isn't ready to completely create their own thing. But where might they go to find something that they could sort of repurpose for, for their classroom or discipline?

Andy: [10:56] Sure, that's a great idea. So, or a great question. One easy way to start is simply take a look at those OpenStax textbooks that I mentioned, for example, right? So while they are, I describe them as being just off-the-shelf, ready to go textbooks. And they are, but remember that you can remix them and tailor them, et cetera. So take a look at the textbook. If there are chapters that you don't need, pull them out of the PDF. If there are things that you would like to augment that are in the book or add to the book, go ahead and write a couple pages and stick it into the book, right? I mean, like you have the freedom to tailor that book specifically how you want for your classroom. Beyond that, typical sources of like Open Access Scholarship can be put together. And these would be scholarly journal articles found in places like the DOAJ, for example, the Directory of Open Access Journals and other places, as well as online resources like Merlot, that are kind of repositories for open, open educational materials that can range from like an off-the-shelf regular textbook to specific lesson plans or specific articles or little bits and pieces that could be cobbled together.

Melissa: [12:10] Great. So we would love if you shared a couple of those suggestions and then we'll put them in the show notes. And so then listeners can access those because I think, you know, we all have so many things that we're trying to do in our teaching. And there

can be this feeling, “a little bit of something else that I need to try to incorporate.” But I love that. I love all the reasons you’ve given for why you should try to take that extra step, right? And it doesn’t have to be completely overwhelming because there’s things that already exist.

Andy: [12:40] Yeah, that’s exactly right. And, you know, just to kind of further emphasize that point, when we think about what’s unique about a Vanderbilt education, right? We think about the quality of the teachers here, et cetera. And so OER is a way to really amplify what’s unique about the education here, right? I mean, so for example, if every university is pulling the same Pearson textbooks off-the-shelf and using them in their classrooms, where are we seeing the differentiation and the quality of education? Where something like OER allows the faculty more freedom, more creativity to engage with students on their terms, and to really create a unique educational environment.

Melissa: [13:17] I like that a lot. And I’m gonna pull us back just a little bit to the book, so we can, that’s the reason that we’re all here, right? (laughs)

Andy: [13:27] Oh, right.

Melissa [13:29] So the subtitle here for the book is, “A Field Guide for Academic Librarians.” So while it is geared towards those in our profession, I think there’s a lot in here that can be useful for educators of all different types, from instructors to instructional designers. Can you talk a little bit about how the book came about? What drew you to this particular project?

Andy: [13:59] Sure. Sure. So the book was conceived while I worked at a previous institution and myself and Jonathan Lashley, one of the co-editors on the book, were spearheading some open educational resource grant funding opportunities at that institution, as well as starting conversations, similar to the one that we’re having today, across campus. And I think one of the things, we were successful in those initiatives at that institution. But we noticed that the conversation surrounding OER were happening in a number of different areas, right? So this is by definition kind of a transdisciplinary topic, right? I mean, it’s not restricted to librarianship or any place else because it manifests itself in different ways in different areas of the university.

Andy: [14:50] And however, we often noticed that librarians were intimately involved in these

different institutions. And it was a theme that was of interest to librarians. But there was not one resource that could really effectively describe what, OER are, why they're important, and what the role of the library is. And then provide a series of case studies based on your institutional context to see like what people have done in their institutions that have been successful, what challenges have they faced, et cetera.

Andy: [15:18] So we wanted to pull that all together And the reason we subtitled it, "A Field Guide for Academic Librarians," is that we wanted it to be very, very practically oriented to get people up to speed on what OER are, and then give them very practical advice on how to implement them on their campuses.

Andy: [15:37] And I should say that it was important to all three of us, myself, Jonathan, and Anne Langley, when we created this book, the book be an OER in itself and as well, right.

Melissa: [15:47] That's great.

Andy: [15:49] So to that end, we contacted Pacific University Press, which was a delight to work with and a really interesting press in that, to my knowledge, they are the only press who had been born out of the library. I think library press mergers have been popular. But to my knowledge, Pacific is the only library that, that gave birth to the university press, and they have a very pro open access approach, as a result of that.

Andy: [16:14] So we publish the book under CC license. It's available for free online, so listeners are free to go and download, download it, share it, repurpose it, do whatever you want with it. We just wanted to put it into the world. And then free copy, I'm sorry, print copies are available for purchase.

Melissa: [16:31] I love that it's very meta, but it also is very appropriate. And I think that it's, it's so much, it can be really difficult to sort of practice what you preach, right? And I think this is, not to take us on a tangent really, but even just the idea of scholarship and how we often are talking about open and wanting our, our scholarship to be available to everyone, yet many of us still publish in proprietary journals. So I really like that this, this publication is out there for anyone, and so we definitely want our listeners to access it. So we'll have that link available, as well. And then there are a lot of different contributions within the book and they cover a lot of different areas. So we really don't have time to get into all of them. But I am interested in if, you know, as you were going through and editing the book, if

you, if anything, jumped out at you in terms of strategies for partnerships with librarians and faculty? Or are there any interesting examples you could share for that?

Andy: [17:48] Yeah, so that's a great question. And I think one of the kind of predominant themes in the book is the importance of communication on the part of librarians. I think, like librarians are in an interesting kind of position in the University because we have like tendrils into all of the different academic departments, right?

Melissa: [18:09] We don't want to say we infiltrated, but, well.

Andy: [18:11] But we have. (laughs)

Melissa: [18:12] We have. (laughs)

Andy: [18:13] Right, so because we have all of those connections with the entire academic enterprise, of the institution, librarians are in a really good position to find who at their institutions is already doing this work. Because at the vast majority of institutions, someone will be doing this work. And to help that person tell their story, to create opportunities for that person to tell their story, to bring in experts to talk about why OER are important. And in addition to that, I think we're, you know, we're in a real moment of, kind of socially questioning the value of higher education. And, you know, obviously we believe strongly in the power of higher education or we wouldn't be here. But these conversations are happening broadly. And so I think that there is administrative support and faculty interest in college affordability. And as I mentioned in the beginning, one of the few ways that we can address that, specifically is through the cost of textbooks.

Melissa: [19:15] Mhmm.

Andy: [19:15] So from my perspective and many institutions that, that conversation is, there bubbling under the surface, but it takes someone to kind of bring it out and to showcase it, to get the ball rolling.

Melissa: [19:31] And that can be a librarian on campus, but it doesn't have to be. And I think you've hit on, one of the crucial pieces to me with this sort of open education world is that it is very collaborative, it's global. It's not, you know, you're not just doing this work and isolation. And so I like that you mentioned that there, you know, everyone in the higher ed

realm is really, should be, should care about this, right?

Andy: [20:00] Absolutely, absolutely. And the collaboration is a good point, as well. I should mention that. Anne Langley and I are librarians. Jonathan Lashley is an educational technologist. He's not a librarian, but we collaborated closely, at the time we conceived of this, when we were both at Clemson University and we conceived of this as a partnership between the libraries in Clemson online, which is kind of that online education component of the University. And that was a really strong partnership, I think that, that benefited both Clemson online and the libraries and move the conversation about OER forward. So those collaborations are important within the university. And then as you had mentioned, outside of the university as well, if you look at the contribution list, there are a number from major R1 institutions, there are a number from community colleges, from public institutions, from private institutions. And we also have contributions from faculty and from librarians so it's really a very broad collaborative effort.

Melissa: [21:00] Yeah, that's great. We've talked a lot about the benefits of incorporating OER, are there... I don't want to spend time talking about challenges. We're going to look at the positivity. But if you had to maybe pinpoint one challenge that faculty or other instructors might run into...

Andy: [21:20] Time.

Melissa: [21:21] Time. Oh, that's good. So what, do you have, can you expand on that a little bit?

Andy: [21:26] Yeah. So as you mentioned before, making the case for why OER are good, I think is easy to do.

Melissa: [21:34] Yeah.

Andy: [21:24] However, like you'd mentioned, we're all overloaded and we all have a lot to do and we don't have the time to invest in this. And I think one of the, one of the ways to get around this, that we've seen, you can see a number of times in the, in the book is by implementing grant programs, whether that be like buying out someone's class time for a semester so that they have the time to dedicate to this or if it's something above and beyond their normal job duties. So providing a stipend to offer faculty time to address this. The Open

Textbook Network also does road shows, where they will come to a variety of different colleges and universities to talk about the value of OER and faculty that participate in those conversations. And then go online and actually review a textbook. So that it's not a full-fledged peer review, but it's at least a kind of publicly visible, informal vetting process. And there are small stipends available for that, as well. So time is certainly the biggest challenge in getting around that. You can try to engender passion or you can try to buy out time.

Melissa: [22:52] I like it. So those are good strategies. Is there anything else that you want to make sure our listeners know about the book or just about the, I don't know the case for, for OER, any last words of wisdom you'd like to share?

Andy: [23:10] Well, you know, so I can say that we've, we've talked a lot about the potential for open pedagogy, which is, which is huge. But to go back to the affordability point that you had mentioned before. You know, at my previous institution when we instituted a grant funding program, we offered small awards one to each of the colleges at the institution totaling, I don't have the numbers in front of me, but it was totaling less than \$10,000 as a one-time expense. The return on that investment was \$100,000 in student savings per semester.

Melissa: [23:47] Oh my gosh.

Andy: [23:47] So these are small investments of money for a huge return in terms of cost saving. So I just want to drive that point that like there's a lot of potential here to drive down costs broadly across universities. In addition to the new types of pedagogy it enables.

Melissa: [24:05] Wow, that's striking. So this is, this has been fabulous. I, I mentioned at the start of this, I'm interested in this area, but I feel like I've learned so much from Andy since he's been here at Vanderbilt. There's more to learn, there's more important work to do. We're on it, hopefully the listeners are on it, as well. But as we wrap up, Andy, you're going to get to answer the question that all of the esteemed Leading Lines guests get to answer, which is your favorite analog educational technology?

Andy: [24:43] Right, so this one's going to be weird so you're going to have to bear with me, but it's chalk.

Melissa: [24:50] I love it.

Andy: [24:51] I got to give you a story here though, so after I graduated undergrad, I taught English in South Korea for, for a time. And when I was there teaching, they had these. This is 15 years ago. What were at the time really advanced markers for use on a whiteboard. And they were refillable, which is great. You know, it's environmentally friendly. But the things like always leaked all over my hands and I would get the ink on my pants or I would lean against the board. And like when you travel halfway across the world for work, you can only bring so many pairs of pants, right? So within like two weeks, all of my pants were just covered in like markers. And I'm very tall and lanky and had a hard time finding new pants in Korea. So everyday I was like, I wish we just had chalk.

Melissa: [25:41] That's a really good answer. Although halfway through this, sorry, I thought maybe you should change your answer to pants, but always have an extra pair. But I think chalk is a really good one. Well Andy, thank you so much for joining me today. It's always a pleasure to talk to you about these things, but I think you're doing amazing work and I really appreciate you taking the time. The book is fabulous. Thank you.

Andy: [26:03] Thank you, Melissa. I appreciate it. (music)

Derek: [26:07] That was Andrew Wesolek, the director of digital scholarship and scholarly communication at the Jean and Alexander Heard libraries at Vanderbilt University, Thanks to Leading Lines producer, Melissa Mallon for this interview. Melissa is also a librarian, serving as Director of the Peabody Library and Director of Liaison and Instruction Services. She does a lot at Vanderbilt to support librarians in their roles as educators. And I'm really glad to have her perspectives here on the Leading Lines team. I'm also glad that Andy talked about the value of OERs in terms of both affordability and student learning. We spent a lot of time here on campus talking with faculty about ways to engage their students as producers in their courses. And having students create, compile, contribute, to annotate, or edit OER's is a great way to involve students in knowledge production. When students know they're producing resources that other students or members of the general public might use and learn from, the work becomes more authentic and more motivating, often leading to deeper learning for our students. For more on OERs, see Andy's new book, *OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians*. See the show notes in this episode for a link to the book on the Pacific University Press website, where you can download the entire book as a PDF for free. I've also including links to some of the resources Andy mentioned, including OpenStax and the directory of open access journals. To find those show notes, look in your podcast app right now or visit our website, leadinglinespod.com. We'd love to hear your thoughts on

Open Educational Resources. You can find us on Twitter where our handle is @leadinglinespod or reach out via email, leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu (<mailto:leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu>)

[27:48] Leading Lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, The Jean and Alexander Heard libraries, and the Associate Provost for Educational Development and Technologies. This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first third Monday of each month. (music) I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.